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**MACON ACTION PLAN**  
*for the heart of macon*

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Macon Action Plan  
Downtown Parking Study  
January 8, 2015

## Executive Summary

On-street parking spaces are scarce in quantity in Downtown Macon and coveted for their perceived convenience and proximity to destinations. Even when off-street spaces are readily available, many people continue to search for on-street spaces. Once parked in an on-street space, people tend to stay there a long time which greatly limits the availability of spaces for other users. The competition for on street spaces is most intense in the area bounded by Mulberry Street/Third Street/Cherry Street/Cotton Street, where blocks can remain full for the entire day. However, on-street parking outside of this area is easily available.

On-street parking in Macon demonstrates the Tragedy of the Commons: individuals acting in their own self-interest overuse a valuable and limited resource and create an outcome that is undesirable overall for everyone. Longer-duration parking should be encouraged into off-street lots and garages as a matter of smart parking policy, so that precious on-street spaces can be shared among many users for shorter visits. On-street spaces do not turnover at the rate that supports economic development in Downtown. However, there is no incentive to encourage this good behavior: on street parking is free and the two hour time limit is routinely violated.

These conclusions are consistent with previous parking studies in Downtown Macon and reinforce the validity of past recommendations, such as installing parking meters and a more aggressive parking enforcement program. It is recommended that the initial installation of parking meters be completed on these streets:

- Mulberry Street, between west of Second Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Cherry Street, between Cotton Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Cotton Street, between Cherry Street and Mulberry Street
- Second Street, between Cherry Street Lane and Walnut Street Lane
- Third Street, between Cherry Street Lane and Walnut Street Lane

Parking should be priced at \$1.00 per hour and patrons should be able to pay for parking with cash, coins, credit cards, and mobile devices. Multi-space meters should be installed to minimize the impact to the streetscape.

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# 1. Introduction

The resurgence of Downtown Macon has been an incredible act to observe over the last few years. Numerous unique restaurants, businesses and retail options have opened a renewed urban culture has been established. As downtown evolves, so too must the infrastructure that supports it. Parking is an important support system for activity downtown and it also is the first and last experience for everyone who drives downtown. It is a means to an end: a thing we do to achieve something else like going to a restaurant or seeing a concert. When parking is convenient we tend to take it for granted and take away memories of enjoying our experience downtown. But if parking is perceived as a too much of a hassle, it can cloud our entire memory of being Downtown and spread the perception that it isn't worth coming.

People looking for parking in Downtown Macon have two choices: search for a free on-street space in the hope of finding one close to their destination, or pay a fee to park in a parking lot or garage and walk a few blocks to their destination. Because on-street parking has the allure of being both free and potentially closer to the destination most people try to get one of these spaces. However, the demand for these spaces often far exceeds the actual supply, and this competition for spaces leads to people repeatedly circling around the block looking for a space or getting frustrated and choosing to go somewhere else. Neither outcome supports the attractiveness of Downtown.

Parking in Downtown Macon has been studied a number of times in the last twenty years, however, certain of issues persist and have become more severe with growth in residents and businesses in Downtown. The purpose of this study was to re-examine the parking supply and demand in Downtown and develop an implementation plan for a holistic parking management strategy for 2015 and beyond.

As mentioned, there have been a number of studies conducted previously on the issue of parking, including:

- Downtown Parking Management Parking Study, 1990, by RBA Group  
This study collected data of the parking supply and demand in Downtown and found a peak occupancy utilization of 39%. It identified a number of issues with turnover and enforcement. It recommended implementing a one-hour time limit for all on-street spaces.
  - Retail & Parking Analysis & Planning Study performed for NewTown Macon, 2000, by Gibbs Planning Group  
The purpose of this study was to create a framework for a vibrant mixed-use shopping and business district to revitalize Macon. The parking recommendations in this study included installing parking meters, increasing enforcement of on-street parking, implementing wayfinding signage for public off-street parking facilities, and establishing a parking authority for Downtown.
  - A Parking Management Study for Downtown Macon, prepared for Macon-Bibb Urban Development Authority Downtown Council Parking Task Force and NewTown Macon, 2001, by John D. Edwards and Lake-side Engineering, Inc. This study was an update to a similar 1990 study and identified a number of issues with parking turnover and enforcement. Its
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recommendations included installing parking meters, a more aggressive parking enforcement program, establishing a non-profit organization to manage parking in Downtown, and creating a parking promotion program.

All of these previous studies recommended parking meters to better manage the fixed supply of on-street spaces in Downtown Macon; however, they have not been implemented to date. Additional proposals have been submitted to over the last ten years by a variety of vendors to install and operate parking meters in Downtown.

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## 2. Existing Conditions

This study conducted an inventory of parking spaces in Downtown and observed occupancy and use patterns of the spaces. The area studied was bounded by Walnut Street to the north, Pine Street to the south, Fifth Street to the east, and New Street to the south. This area included the majority of the parking demand for existing Downtown land uses and some of the Medical Center.

### Existing Parking Supply

There are three types of parking in Downtown Macon; on-street parking, off-street commercial lots and garages that are open to the public for free or a fee, and off-street accessory parking lots and garages that are restricted to use for a particular building or business. In total, there are approximately 5,800 parking spaces in the study area. This study focused on the on-street parking and off-street commercial facilities

Approximately 20% of the overall parking supply in the Downtown study area, approximately 1,260 spaces, are on-street. The majority of these spaces have a two-hour time limit, but a few are regulated differently.

There are seven off-street commercial parking facilities available to the general public in Downtown that house approximately 1,475 spaces. Many of these spaces are available for hourly and daily use, but some of them only offer monthly parking for employees. The location and size of each facility is listed in **Table 1**.

**Table 1**  
**Inventory of Public Off-Street Parking Facilities**

Parking Facility Location	Number of Spaces
Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard and Cherry Street (structure)	82
Third Street and Poplar Street	30
Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard and Poplar Street (structure)	194
Mulberry Street and 3rd Street Lane (structure)	723
Third Street and Mulberry Street Lane	50
Poplar Street and New Street	148
First Street and Plum Street	245

The remainder of the parking in Downtown Macon, approximately 3,000 spaces, is located in privately owned surface parking lots and structures that are restricted to patrons of specific buildings and businesses.

### Existing Parking Occupancy

SSE, with the assistance of staff from NewTown Macon, observed the occupancy and use patterns of on-street parking spaces and the publicly available off-street parking facilities on typical weekdays in May 2014. Based on the observations, the peak demand period for parking in the study area occurs between 12 pm and 1 pm. This finding is substantiated by SSE's observations which saw many people from Mercer and the Medical Center drive to Downtown for lunch when Downtown employees are also parking there. **Exhibits 1 and 2** shows the hourly parking demand for on-street and off-street spaces in the study area.

About 35% of all on-street spaces are available during the lunch hour peak, but this overall measure gives an incomplete picture. Certain blocks operate at high occupancy levels (more than 85% full) or are even oftentimes totally full in a core area of Downtown (bounded by Mulberry Street to the north, Cherry Street to the south, Third Street to the east and Cotton Street to the west) **Exhibit 3** shows

how many hours a day parking on a block is heavily congested," which is when the occupancy rate is above 85%. Many block faces are heavily congested all through the day, not just at lunchtime. However, outside of this core area, blocks are rarely full and occupied at low levels that make it easy to find an open space anytime.

Parking use counts were also conducted at publicly available off-street facilities and are shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 2**  
**Peak Occupancy of Off-Street Parking Facilities**

Parking Facility Location	Number of Spaces	%Occupied In Peak Hour
MLK/Cherry (structure)	82	23%
Third/Poplar	30	70%
MLK/Poplar (structure)	194	22%
Mulberry/Third (structure)	723	30%
Third/Mulberry	50	76%
Poplar/New	148	68%
First/Plum	245	49%

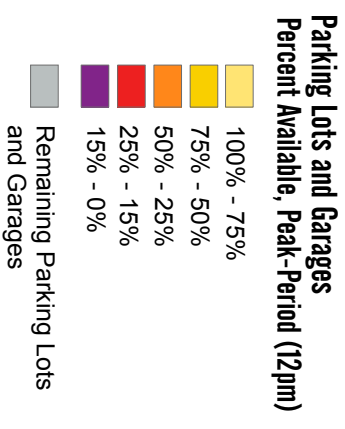
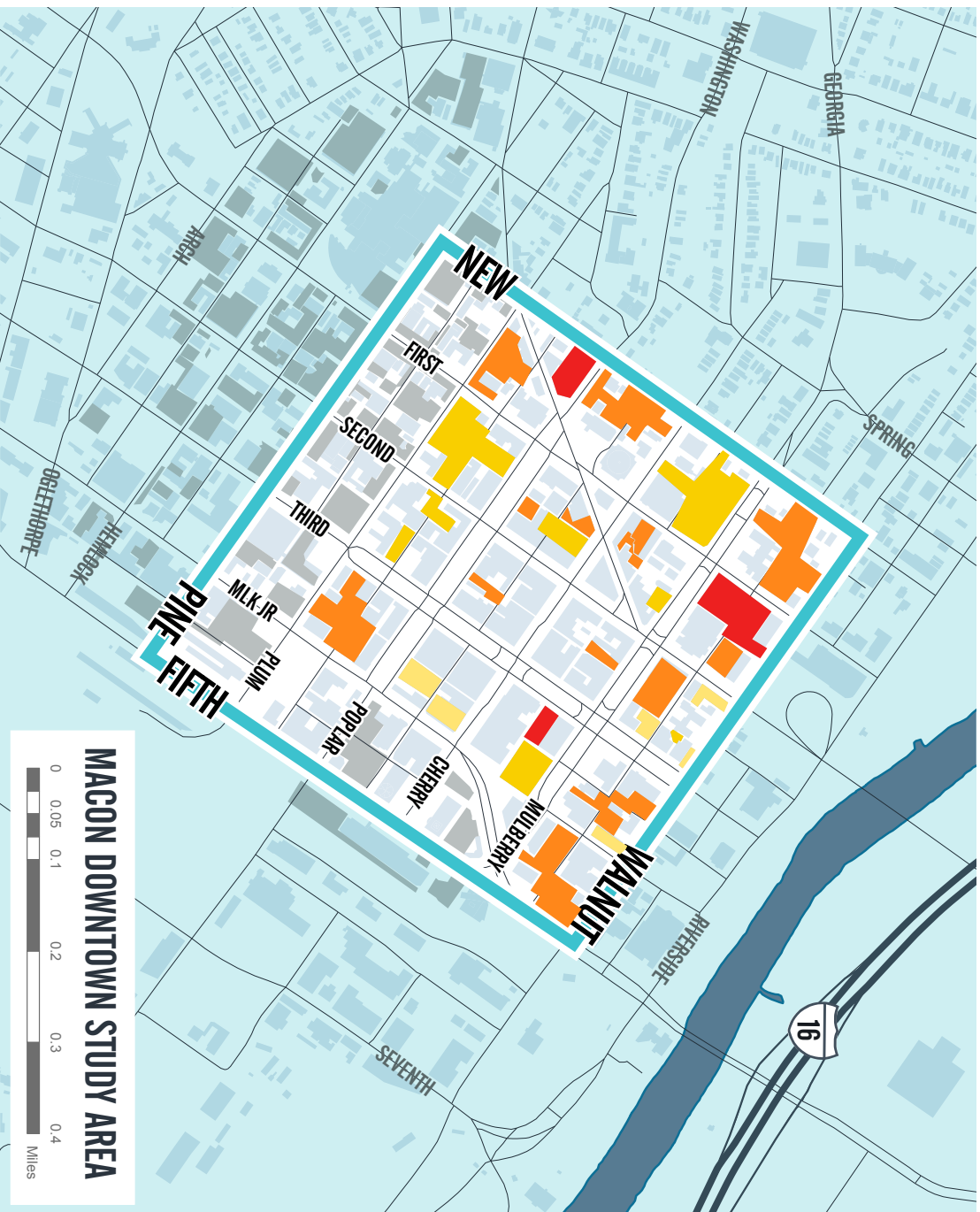
There is a considerable amount of parking available in these facilities and no signs of congestion, particularly in the parking structure at Mulberry Street and 3rd Street Lane.

#### Existing Parking Turnover

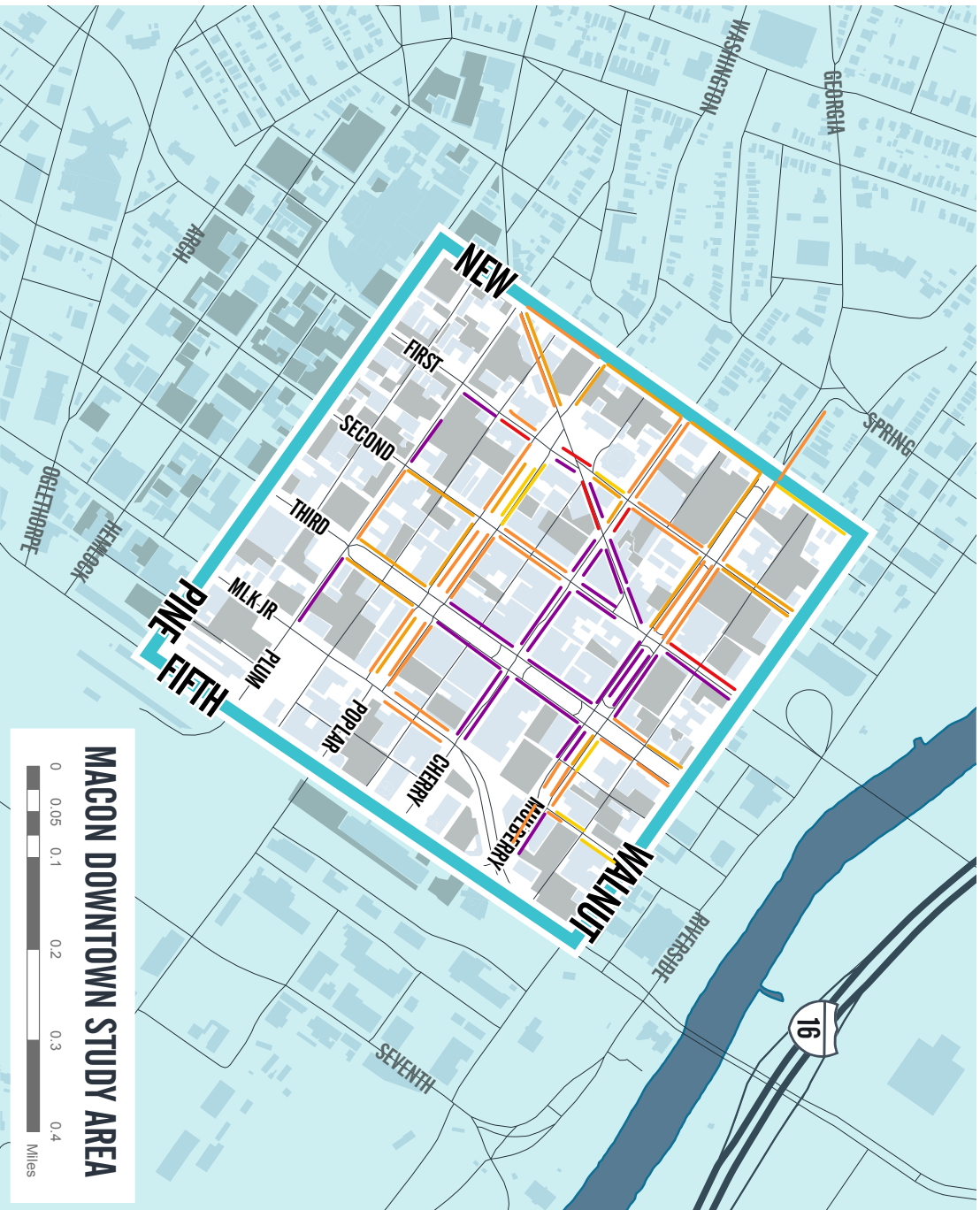
Parking turnover refers to how many times an on-street parking space is used in a day by different vehicles. To support a successful Downtown on-street spaces should turnover several times throughout the day since this demonstrates that multiple individuals are coming Downtown and able to access parking. Macon promotes parking turnover by regulating the duration of stay in an on-street space (mostly a 2-hour limit). Macon Police officers are responsible for enforce this restriction by noting vehicles parked at one time and then coming back later in the day to see if the vehicle is still there.

Turnover observations collected illustrates that 44% of vehicles are parked on-street in excess of the two-hour restrictions. When people violate the limit and hoard a space it reduces the productivity that can be achieved from the limited supply of on-street spaces. Low turnover contributes to the high occupancy rates and congestion, making it difficult for visitors and patrons to find parking. Ideally, a parking space should turn over 5 to 8 times per day in a vibrant downtown, not the 2 times a day as observed in the study area.

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# EXHIBIT 1



**Macon Downtown Study Area**

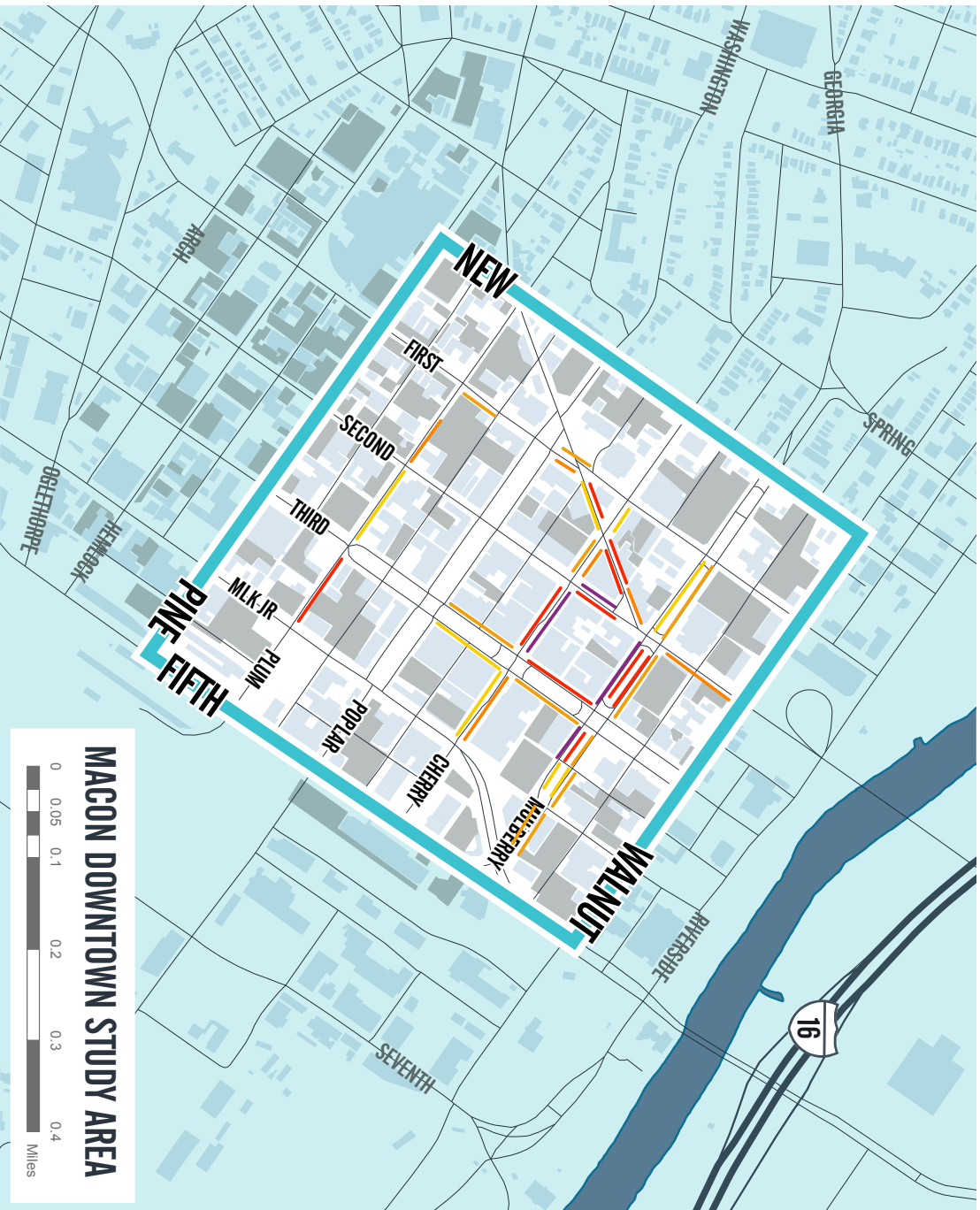
0 0.05 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4  
Miles

- On Street Parking  
Percent Available, Peak-Period (12pm)**
- 100% - 75%
  - 75% - 50%
  - 50% - 25%
  - 25% - 15%
  - 15% - 0%

\* 0-15% availability

# EXHIBIT 2





**On Street Parking  
Full Occupancy, \* 10AM-2PM**

- 1 Hour
- 2 Hours
- 3 Hours
- 4 Hours
- 5 Hours

■ Parking Lots and Garages

\* 0-15% availability

**EXHIBIT 3**

### 3. Peer City Review

Many downtowns across Georgia and the United States are facing similar challenges with parking as Macon. This study presented an opportunity to learn from how other cities are managing their Downtown parking needs.

#### Savannah, GA (population:142,000)

There are 3,000 metered on-street parking spaces in Downtown Savannah that are priced from \$0.30 to \$1.00 per hour on weekdays and free on Saturday and Sunday. There are also 5 public parking garages that are priced from \$1.00 to \$2.00 per hour. The City has a ParkSmart program to provide information on the quantity, location and price of parking, and administers a permit parking system to allow residents to park free on metered streets within a block of which they live.

#### Athens, GA (population 120,000)

There are 700 metered on-street parking spaces in Downtown Athens, which are priced at \$0.75 per hour Monday through Saturday, 8am to 10 pm. There are approximately 1,300 public spaces in parking decks where the first thirty minutes are free and then \$1.50 per hour is charged. The parking system is run by the Downtown Development Authority and staffed by about 21 employees (8 full-time and 13 part-time).

#### Asheville, NC (population 87,000)

There are more than 700 metered on-street parking spaces in Downtown Asheville priced at \$1.25 per hour Monday through Saturday, 8 am to 6 pm. There are four public parking garages where the first hour is free and then \$1.00 per hour is charged. The pricing structure is notable since it is less expensive to parking in the garage than on-street.

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## 4. Parking Management Strategies

Parking is an issue that has been studied for almost 25 years in Downtown Macon and yet the same issues persist: turnover is a problem and popular blocks are always full. This issue needs to be addressed now so Downtown can continue to grow and parking can play its proper role in this growth.

### 1. Install parking meters

Without a management mechanism employees and commuters park in prime spaces that are more important for short-term parkers like customers at shops and restaurants. Pricing parking is an extremely effective way to balance parking supply and demand.

Prices can be set at a market rate that will achieve an acceptable vacancy rate and ensure that a space is always available for someone -- a 15% vacancy rate is typically ideal. If too few spaces are available it means the price is too low and commuters and bargain-hunters are hoarding the spaces. If too many spaces are vacant, the price should be reduced to make sure the spaces are being used to their maximum potential.

The revenue generated by pricing parking is a side-effect of this approach. The goal of pricing is to ensure that visitors and patrons can always find an available space in a location that is convenient.

It is recommended that parking meters be installed in Downtown Macon. This is the same recommendation that previous studies have recommended. Details of where to install parking meters, the recommended technology, and pricing are included in the implementation section.

### 2. Identify Parking Management Entity

The entity that manages parking in Downtown should be motivated by both financial and social objectives. The system should cover its costs, but not at the expense of hurting Downtown. It is recommended that a private or non-profit entity be responsible for managing all aspects of Downtown parking. This includes collecting revenue, enforcement, wayfinding, and other aspects of the system.

### 3. Develop agreements with private lots

The future parking management entity should work with owners of underutilized private surface parking lots to encourage these facilities to be open to the public, either on an hourly or monthly basis. Adding more parking supply will help reduce the costs for parking in Downtown. Consideration should also be given by the parking management entity of developing a management agreement with existing public parking facilities so that all parking is operated under one entity to make the overall system as efficient and customer friendly as possible.

### 4. Develop residential parking strategy

If parking meters are installed on streets where people live, a residential parking permit program will be necessary. Potential alternatives for this program are discussed in the following section.

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#### 5. Communications

A robust communications program will be necessary to ensure parking best serves the needs of Downtown. This will include initial outreach with the installation of parking meters as well as improved distribution of information on parking for visitors, employers, and patrons. This communications program should be run by the entity managing the overall parking system.

#### 6. Wayfinding

There is currently no wayfinding to direct people where to park, either on-street or off-street. A wayfinding program is necessary to better identify where people should park.

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## 5. Implementation

Parking meters in Downtown Macon will need to not only support the growth of the area, but also be implemented in a way that is most cost and revenue efficient. The parking meter system should encourage the turnover of vehicles and make the experience as easy as possible for patrons. In addition to the parking meters, there are a number of additional costs that will be required both hard (fees, supplies, etc) and soft (direct labor, indirect costs, marketing). This section provides the details of how to implement parking meters in Downtown Macon.

### Parking meter and enforcement infrastructure

As opposed to just a few years ago, when the only option for paying for parking involved putting coins into a single space parking meter, there now exists a variety of options for parking meters and enforcement. The available options continue to evolve with technology and the widespread use of mobile devices.

There are a number of factors to consider when making the decision on the type of meters, but the most important factors are to balance customer convenience with the cost of equipment and the cost of enforcement with the effectiveness of enforcement. We recommend the following options for Downtown Macon:

- The type of parking meter should be a multi-space parking kiosk that accepts cash and coins, credit cards, and cell phone payments. The multi-space meters take up less space in the streetscape than single-space meters and are easy to use. Multi-space meters can be configured for pay and display (patron pays for parking and then puts a receipt in their dashboard), pay by space (patrons pay for at the meter for the specific space they are parked in), or pay by license plate (patrons pay at the meter and input their license plate). It is recommended that the multi-space meters and the parking spaces themselves initially be set up for pay by space and eventually transition to pay and display in order to increase the number of parking spaces on the street. Pay by space is the easiest for patrons to use, since they don't have to walk back to their cars to put in the receipt, but it is also the least efficient system as far as the number of metered spaces.
  - A mobile application should be developed, in partnership with one of the numerous companies vendors that provide this service, so patrons can pay for meters with their mobile device, both at the time of parking and when they need to add time to the parking meter. This app should be available for both iPhones and Android devices and should be as easy as possible for users to install and operate.
  - Four handheld parking enforcement readers should be purchased for the staff responsible for enforcement and the readers should allow for tickets to be processed immediately.
  - Signage will be necessary to make users aware that they must pay for parking and where the multi-space meters are located. For cost purposes, it is assumed that three signs will be necessary for each meter. The design of the signs should meet the standards within the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD) and the colors should be part of any branding effort of Downtown.
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### Cost of parking and time restrictions

The purpose for pricing parking is not to collect revenue, but to set a fair market price that encourages turnover of the most in-demand parking spaces in Downtown. The cost of these parking spaces will help balance supply and demand and discourage commuters from sitting in a space all day long. If the parking spaces are underpriced or free as it is currently, everyone will want to park there. If the cost is too high, the demand will be low or non-existent and it will create additional "dead space" on the street. Parking should be priced so that the resulting turnover always keeps spaces available, but the occupancy at any one time is around 75-85%, or one to two spaces per block.

It is recommended that the initial hourly price of parking be \$1.00. This cost is similar to other Downtowns in Georgia. If this price does not rectify the existing issues with turnover and demand, the price can always be raised. It is recommended that after six months additional data be collected to determine if any adjustments in the price of parking should be made, including reducing the cost of parking during low demand days and increasing the cost of parking during high demand days.

The parking meters should operate from 8:00 AM – 6:00 PM on all streets and from 8:00 AM – 10:00 PM on Cherry Street to reflect the night time hours of many of the businesses on Cherry Street. Existing time based parking restrictions that regulate how long a vehicle can remain in a parking space should be eliminated, allowing people to park for as long as they want based on their needs. Consideration should be given to allowing free parking on Sundays or after church services have completed.

### Staffing

The entity managing the parking will require a number of staff persons to manage the day to day needs of the parking system. It is recommended that the initial staffing plan include the following positions:

- A parking manager
- Administrative/bookkeeping support
- Three to five parking/downtown ambassadors that will also be in charge of enforcement
  - One to two staff focused on maintenance and operations

### Estimated costs

Based on information from previous studies and other parking systems in Georgia, we have developed a number of estimates for the installation of parking meters and the annual costs. These costs are listed below.

#### Installation costs

- Multi-space parking meter costs - \$8,500 per meter
- Meter installation and signage costs - \$1,000 per meter
- Signage costs - \$300 per meter

#### Operating costs

- Monthly connectivity fee - \$50 per meter
- Receipt paper - \$200 per meter per year
- Batteries - \$40 per meter per year

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- Transaction fee - \$0.25 per transaction
  - Payroll costs - \$200,000 - \$250,000 per year

### Parking Meter Locations

The locations of where to install parking meters will determine the success of success of the parking management program. There is a specific area within Downtown where the demand exists that people will be willing to pay for parking, but this is not the entirety of Downtown. If the locations cover an area that is too small, this will just push the existing problem to the adjacent blocks. If the locations cover an area that is too large, then a large number of metered spaces will be unused. This will not only have serious financial impacts, but also create entire blocks of unused parking, which negatively impacts the quality of life in Downtown Macon. The initial installation must be immediately successful. We have developed two potential alternatives of where to install parking meters and a comparative financial analysis of both.

#### Alternative One – Core Area Only

Parking meters would be installed on the block segments that currently experience the highest demand and are most difficult areas to find parking. This area consists of:

- Mulberry Street, between west of Second Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Cherry Street, between Cotton Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Cotton Street, between Cherry Street and Mulberry Street
- Second Street, between Cherry Street Lane and Walnut Street Lane
- Third Street, between Cherry Street Lane and Walnut Street Lane

This equates to approximately 462 metered parking spaces and a total of 40 multi-space parking meters.

Pros – It is currently difficult to find a parking space in this area throughout the day and parking meters will alleviate this issue through the price signal they send. Many of the land uses in the area, such as restaurants and retail, draw in visitors who only want to stay in the area for a short time (less than two hours). The likelihood for success with parking meters in this area is very high.

Cons – Because the meters do not cover the entirety of Downtown, it is possible that employees and other people who currently park on-street in Downtown will simply relocate a few blocks away as opposed to paying for parking in one of the off-street facilities. Some businesses or other entities may be upset that the parking on their street is priced while it is free in other parts of Downtown.

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### Alternative Two – Extend Beyond Core Area

To address the potential issue of employees and others using the on-street spaces right beyond the area of metered spaces, consideration can be given to extending the meters further out. The suggested area for this alternative is as follows:

- Mulberry Street, between First Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Cherry Street, between First Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Poplar Street, between First Street and Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
- Cotton Street, between Cherry Street and Mulberry Street
- First Street, between Poplar Street and Mulberry Street
- Second Street, between Poplar Street and Mulberry Street
- Third Street, between Poplar Street and Mulberry Street

This equates to approximately 802 parking meter spaces and a total of 86 parking meters.

Pros – This area creates a paid parking system for essentially all of Downtown. It would discourage the possibility of parking spaces being used by employees or others. It would also maximize the amount of gross revenue that would be generated by parking meters.

Cons –The costs to operate in a larger area, but installation and operating costs, will be significantly higher. The demand for parking in these additional areas will not be nearly as high as the core area, so there will likely be empty blocks throughout the day where no one wants to pay for parking. One potential solution would be to have a lower price for meters outside of the core area.

### Comparative Financial Analysis of Alternatives

In order to determine which alternative should be initially implemented, SSE developed a rough estimate of the overall costs and revenues that each alternative would generate on an annual basis. We believe that the analysis is somewhat conservative, both the with the revenue projections and the cost estimates, to provide a bad-case scenario. To estimate the revenue, we projected that 40% of all meter hours (8 hours per day, 300 days per year, multiplied by the number of meters) would be utilized in Alternative One and 30% of all meter hours would be utilized in Alternative Two. The projected costs, revenue, and profit for each alternative are shown in **Table 3**.

**Table 3**  
**Comparative Financial Analysis of Alternatives**

	Alternative One	Alternative Two
Number of Parking Spaces	462	802
Number of Meters	40	86
Installation Cost	\$373,000	\$801,950
Annual Operating Costs	\$158,340	\$234,645
Annual Payroll Costs	\$200,000	\$250,000
Amortization of Equipment (Seven Years)	\$57,642	\$123,931
Annual Revenue	\$554,400	\$721,800
Annual Net Profit	\$138,418	\$113,224



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As can be seen from the above Table, Alternative One returns a slightly higher annual profit. It is recommended that the meters be installed within the core area to ensure that the program is a success, both in supporting existing businesses and covering costs. After six months, the parking situation should be evaluated again with additional data collection and surveys to determine the impacts of the program and if additional parking meters should be installed.

Implementation

It is recommended that the implementation of metered on-street parking include annual reports and evaluation to provide transparency to the public. This should include data with respect to parking demand and turnover and surveys of businesses, patrons, and residents.

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